



Mr. Ford's Page



IT IS a New Year, but there will be an astonishing number of old things about it. Its newness is undeniable, but its familiar lines are unmistakable. One would find it not an easy task to separate the newness from the oldness during the year. Yet the Year itself is new. Every experience that shall befall us during its 52 weeks, will also be new. It may be familiar, known, but still it will be new. Life is made up of a repetition of similar experiences, with now and then an unfamiliar one to stand out as a landmark.

It is a new cycle of time. A new breadth, as it were, woven in the Loom, raw material of which to make what we will. That—the time cycle—at least so far as we are concerned, is new.

But it is raw material. The fully made-up year is the finished product. What it may be like we have just had the opportunity to see. A made-up year has just passed out of the Time-factory, to take its place among the other 1919 years of this era.

It is not a particularly flattering product, the year we have just finished. Stand it up, turn it around, and examine it, and it doesn't stand scrutiny very well. It appears to be decidedly amateurish and very much botched. In no single particular is it standardized. There are spots here and there upon it which would seem to indicate that moments came to the makers when they really had an idea of making something—but then they seem to have resumed their aimless puttering again.

No; as we look at the year upon which history has just affixed the label "1920" we are not willing that it should serve as a sample year. It isn't good enough.

The reason is, of course, simple to understand. The human race has not been very long in the business of Year-Making. There are only 1920 credited to the production record of the Christian Era, and that is a comparatively small number.

"But after making 1920 years, a perfect year ought to be turned out now and then," might appear to be a natural objection.

That brings us to the "labor turnover." The same people have not been engaged in making the entire 1920 years. There is an immense turnover of humanity every generation. People appear on the earth, pass a few careless apprentice years, and then seriously try—some of them—to do a man's work upon the making of the Years. But hardly have they learned the rudiments when a new shift comes, new and unaccustomed hands take up the work. The years run on, they come out precisely at the end of December on schedule time, but they do not show on their human side the marks of unity and mastery.

The year is after all but a small bit in the mosaic of the Age, and perhaps we shall be better able to judge it from a perspective which enables us to see the whole pattern; but even so, we are right in feeling that the whole mosaic of the age would be better, if each bit were better made.

Inevitably, next December, we shall have to deliver to the Builder of the Age another year, and it is natural to wonder what it may turn out to be.

What have we new about the year? Very little, except the time. That has never been used before, will never be used again.

But the old things that troop along into the New Year are very numerous. It is almost like the same old family moving into a new house; very little is changed after all.

It is the same old Earth, for one thing. And that is a genuine benefit. We know what the Earth will do. We know what we can absolutely depend on it to do. That is a great saving of time, for, if this year the human race had to begin all over again and by careful and costly experiment find out the powers of the Earth, the year would be almost empty.

But we know that the soil will radiate the sun's warmth in spring, that moisture and heat will create chemical conditions out of which man's food will come; we know that the earth will pro-

duce lumber and ores and material for clothing. We have learned all that. It is no longer a question of anxious uncertainty. Take up a handful of soil; in it are the elements of food, clothing, shelter for all mankind.

Then, we bring into the New Year the same old necessity of getting busy in order to set the soil doing for us the things we need. And it is remarkable, when you begin to put the soil at work, how many men you have to put at work too. If it is the era of "the man with the hoe," somebody has to make the hoe. And then somebody must take part of the product of the hoe's work to the man who helped make the hoe; and before you know it you have started the Great Sisterhood of Arts in motion—Agriculture, Manufacture, Transportation.

It may be a better Agriculture—exchanging the hoe for a tractor; it may be a better Manufacture—exchanging the burden from men to machines; it may be a better Transportation—leaving the hand-drawn or ox-drawn cart for the motor vehicle on land or in air; but in spite of improvement it is the same raising, making and carrying of what we need. It is work in its primary and essential forms.

We are also taking with us into the New Year the old-fashioned

rule that what a man earns is his own, and no one has the right to take it unjustly from him. It is a very good rule; without the stability it offers, society would be as impossible as agriculture would be if there were no certainty about the order of the seasons or the operations of nature. Many men try to change this rule; they want what another man has earned, and they want to take it in the name of "society." But people who have learned this fundamental wisdom and justice of the relation between personal and property rights, never unlearn it.

It would be very hopeful, however, if we could get some new things for the New Year. We begin work on 1921 under strange conditions. The Earth is just what it always was. Human needs, which are the mainspring of all activity, are just what they always were. Material and men, the essential components of civilization, are both here in abundance, and yet there is a stoppage of activity.

Why? Because, apparently, something has happened to—what? To the soil? No. To men? No. To material resources? No. But something has happened to that quantity known as Money. They are making it "less" in the country, "contracting the currency," they call it. They are trying to make money more nearly measure up with the gold. Why? Because "they" have decreed that Gold is the basis of Money.

There is not enough gold to go around. Even as a measure of wealth,

there is not enough gold to equal in figures the actual wealth. There is not enough gold in existence to pay the interest on the war debts accumulated by the nations during the last few centuries. To make business wait on gold is like making the passenger traffic of a main line dependent on the facilities of a local branch with one small train a day. If gold did the work it might be as acceptable as anything else; but it doesn't.

It would be a splendid thing if in 1921 some financier, whose business is making prosperity instead of making money, should show us the way to avoid having business tied up for money, when all the elements of business are here. Financiers have been very skillful in devising schemes which draw all the money to New York; now for a financier who shall devise a scheme to keep the money in the local communities where it is needed! As long as we must have money, let us have it under a system where it helps instead of hinders, where it keeps men in their jobs instead of letting them out. Such a plan would make 1921 a great year. It would help the millions who are not financiers, but who are always under the pressure of our present financial system.

THE New Year will have to conform to some very old rules which will continue because they are good rules. But that is no reason why the New Year should put up with old mistakes and abuses. At its very threshold we find every element of prosperity present—the need, the men, the materials—and yet because of money conditions there is a slow-up. Either there ought to be enough money to carry the essential activities of the country, or a curtailment of money's power to stop things. There is more wealth than money; and as long as real wealth is compelled to wait on the fictitious wealth which is measured in gold, troubles will continue. Here is a task for 1921.